

“kə” and “xu” as Parallel Focus Markers in Ilami Dialect of Kurdish

By

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Abstract

In this paper, we will try to specify and analyze different functions of “kə” and “xu” (that) in Ilami dialect of Kurdish. We figured out that, these multifunctional elements serve a remarkable number of roles in this dialect as complementizer, relative pronoun, etc. “kə” can also be used with an equal meaning to “when”, “because”, etc. Analyzing our data, we understood that, although these particles both make an item focalized, their occurrence is greatly determined by some contextual and pragmatic factors. In other words, each particle is purposefully used to focalize and convey specific intentions. Based on results, it was also concluded that these particles, can co-occur and focalize different constituents at the left or right side.

Key words: Kurdish, Focus, Focus Marker, Kurdish “kə”, Kurdish “xu”.

1. Introduction

There are many strategies by which an element can be focalized in speech. Speakers focalize items, due to a range of linguistic and para-linguistic factors. In this article, we try to show, how an item can be “reinforced¹” in speech. Let us define the term “focus”:

1.1 Focus

Focus is a term used by some linguists in two-part analysis of sentences which distinguishes between the information assumed by speakers, and that which is at the centre (or ‘focus’) of their communicative interest; ‘focus’ in this sense is opposed to presupposition. (The contrast between given and new information makes an analogous distinction.) For example, in the sentence *It was **Mary** who came to tea*, *Mary* is the focus (as the intonation contour helps to signal). Taking such factors into account is an

¹. Throughout this article, we use the term **reinforcement** as an equal term to focus.

important aspect of inter-sentence relationships: it would not be possible to have the above sentence as the answer to the question *What did Mary do?*, but only to *Who came to tea?*(Crystal, 2003:183).

Dik defines focal information as follows:

The focal information in a linguistic expression is that information which is relatively the most important or salient in the given communicative setting, and considered by S[the speaker_CSB] to be most essential for A [the addressee_CSB] to integrate into his pragmatic information. (Dik, 1997: 326)

Such focal information may be either additive, increasing the addressee's store of pragmatic information, or replacive, intended to substitute a piece of information for one already in the addressee's store. Clear cases of focality arise in the answers given to questions, which by their very nature fill a gap of some kind in the questioner's information. (1997: 328_330)

Dik warns against any strict equation of focality with newness of information: although focality may indeed be related to the piece of information being presented as new (in other words previously unavailable) to the addressee, there are occasions on which a speaker will focalize information which, although it has already been mentioned in the discourse or could be assumed to be available to the addressee from some other source, is nevertheless salient because of some contrast, whether explicit or implicit. (Bulter, 2003: 65)

The notion of focus is explicitly expressed in Halliday's (1967) definition of focus:

Information focus is one kind of emphasis, that whereby the speaker marks out a part (which may be the whole) of a message block as that which he wishes to be interpreted as informative. What is focal is "new" information; not in the sense that it cannot have been previously mentioned, although it is often the case that it has not been, but in the sense that the speaker presents it as not being recoverable from the preceding discourse ... The focus of the message, it is suggested, is that which is represented by the speaker as being new, textually (and situationally) non-derivable information. (Halliday, 1967: 204)

Focus may be highlighted either prosodically or syntactically or both, depending on the language. In syntax this can be done assigning focus markers, as shown in "I saw [JOHN]_f" or by preposing as shown in "[JOHN]_f I saw". Focus also relates to phonology and has ramifications for how and where supra-segmental information such as rhythm, stress, and intonation is encoded in the grammar, and in particular intonational tunes which mark focus.(Beaver& Brady, 2008)

In this article, we aim to show, how and where "kə" (that), as a focus marker, is used in a structure and focalizes an item. It should be pointed that "xu" is another focus marker used parallel to "kə".

As far as we know, there is no prominent work done in Kurdish to discuss this topic, however, there are many works analyzing different functions of ke (as the equivalent morpheme of kə in Kurdish) in Persian. Since Persian, like Kurdish, is an Iranian language and shares many common features with Kurdish, we refer to some of these works briefly: Estaji (2011) tries to give a historical look and describe different roles of "ke" in old, middle and contemporary Persian. She believes that "ke" has had many roles in Persian as a complementizer, interrogative pronoun, etc. Then she discusses the forms derived from interrogative "ke" and currently used in contemporary Persian. Lazard (1992) believes that in Modern Standard Persian, **ke** is frequently used to show subordination of all types:

(1) *šenīdam ke ū xāhad āmad.* (Lazard 1992: 222)
 heard.1SG – SUB – s/he – will – come
 'I heard that s/he will come.'

(2) *kesī-ke to dīde-ī emrūz raft.* (Lazard 1992:229)
 someone-SUB – you – have -seen – today – went
 'Someone you saw went away today.'

(3) a. *nazdīk ke āmad ū-rāšenāxtam.* (Lazard 1992:238)
 near – SUB – came – s/he-FOC – recognised.1SG
 'When s/he came near I recognized her/him.'

b. *raftam ke ān ketāb-rābexaram.* (Lazard 1992:218)
 went.1SG – SUB – DEM – book-FOC – buy.1SG
 'I went to buy the book.'

Sadat Tehrani (2004) describes a “*ke-construction*” in modern Persian which, he believes, is used to show “indifference” and “defiance”. He claims that this construction is viewed as a lexical entry with a phonological, a syntactic, and a semantic/conceptual component. He claims that this construction is declarative and has a specific intonation pattern.

Aghaee (2006) discusses the syntactic properties of “*ke-clause*” in Persian. He believes that “*ke*” in Persian is of two kinds: property-denoting and proposition-denoting. The first is the one in which “*ke*” functions as relative pronoun and the clause modifies the NP occurring before “*ke*”. In proposition denoting “*ke-clauses*”, *ke* functions as complementizer followed by a subordinate clause containing a proposition. Babak (2003) believes that “*ke*” in Persian is an emphatic adverb used to emphasize other formatives. Taghvaipour (2004) analyzes Persian restrictive relative clauses (RCs) in the Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar (HPSG) framework.

An introduction to Kurdish

Kurdish has many dialects, and Ilami is one of these varieties. Britannica describes Kurdish so:

Kurdish is a new western Iranian language spoken in Kurdistan; it ranks as the third largest Iranian language group, after Persian and Pashto, and has numerous dialects. There are two main dialect groups. The northern group-spoken from Mosul, Iraq, into the Caucasus—is called Kurmānji; in Turkey, Hawar (Turkized Latin) characters are used in the written form. It is spoken within a broad region that stretches roughly from Orūmīyeh, Iran, to the lower reaches of traditional Kurdistan in Iraq. In Iraq, Kurdī is the official form of Kurdish.

As noted, Ilami (sometimes is called Feyli) is another variety under the Kurdish umbrella. This dialect is widely spoken in Ilam, a small mountainous city located at the west of Iran. Ilami shares some similarities with Kermanshahi and Kalhori. Although most of Kurdish varieties have ergative system, Ilami does not have such a system (Kalbasi, 2010).

Data analysis

In this section, we try to cite sufficient examples of **ke** and **xu** in different positions and then we analyze these instances and highlight **ke** and **xu** roles. In order to gather and analyze our data, we got help from

one of authors' linguistic intuition. For more convenience, English literal and exact translations are given for each example.

| Kurdish Example | English Translation |
|--|---|
| pejagæ (kə) dawræ nifti qawməmanæ. Man the there was sitting my relative is | The man, who was sitting there, is my relative. |
| jaru ləbasæ (kə) ære xwæm sənəm damæ duma that clothes the for myself bought turned back | I returned the clothes to the store. |
| jaru kətawæ (kə) də æli sənəmæ haliman that book from Ali have gotten yet nənuressəmæ have not seen | I have not studied Ali's book yet. |
| zənæ (kə) wærdəm wət nənasim the woman with me spoke not knew I | I did know the woman (who) spoke with me. |
| kawfelæ (kə) kawən, hənəlijan shoes the (which) blue are, belong to ali. | The shoes which are blue, belong to Ali. |
| wənæ gəfurjanæ, bəxwæ those which are washed, eat! | Eat those which are washed! |

In the examples above, **kə** can be used as a relative pronoun. Here the use of **kə** is optional. For example in this sentence, “jaru ləbasæ (**kə**) ære xwæm sənəm damæ duma”, **kə** can be deleted and the sentence is still acceptable, but it is probably less natural and no item is “reinforced”. **kə** in these instances, can be replaced by **xu** too. When replaced, the pragmatic function of the sentence noticeably changes. Let us illustrate this change more obviously:

1. a. pejagæ dawræ nifti qawməmanæ → No constituent is focalized.
b. pejagæ **xu** dawræ nifti 'qawməmanæ. The probable respond will be: wæ dəru!
With lie
'Really?!'
c. pejagæ **kə** 'dawræ nifti qawməmanæ → Means: That man, and not the other.
2. a. jaru ləbasæ ære xwæm sənəm damæ duma → No constituent is focalized.
b. jaru ləbasæ **xu** ære xwæm sənəm 'damæ duma. The probable respond will be: wæ dəru!
With lie
'Really?!'
c. jaru ləbasæ **kə** 'ære xwæm sənəm damæ duma. → Means: Those specific clothes.

We should remember that in (1.b) and (2.b) “qawməmanæ” and “damæ duma” are focalized, while in (1.c) and (2.c) “dawræ nifti” and “ære xwæm sənəm” are focalized respectively. Additionally, these stressed items do not necessarily contain new information. Now we examine the following examples to determine, whether these parallel particles can come together or not:

- a. jaru ləbasæ **gə** ære xwæm sənəm **xu** damæ duma
- b. jaru kətawæ **gə** də æli sənəmæ haliman nənuressəmæ **xu**.
- c. zənæ **gə** wærdəm wət nənasim **xu**.
- d. me **gə** dawræ niftim di wawræ nat **xu**.
I that there was sitting there did not come that
since I was sitting, s/he did not come there.
- e. jə **gə** tʃændæfæ dimæ **xu**.

this that several times saw I.

I have seen it several times.

- f. imæ gə wətimən **xu** e tʃeʃtæ qəbul nijækəjm.
We said (that) this thing agree do not.

The answer is yes. They can co-occur and focalize two constituents in a single sentence. So it is clear that, at least in these examples they do not block one another. As it can be seen, focalized constituents can be at the left or right side of the focus markers. It should be noted that **xu** is more effective than **kə** (or **gə** as the velarized form). In other words, when these items come together, **xu** wins the competition and the expected response will be, REALLY?!

It is worth noting that, when these markers co-occur in a sentence, usually **kə** is followed by **xu** and the opposite seldom sounds grammatical:

- *²jaru ləbasæ **xu** ære xwæm sənəm gə damæ duma
- *jaru kətawæ **xu** də æli sənəmæ haliman nənurəsəmæ gə.
- *zənæ **xu** wərdəm wət nənəsim gə.
- *me **xu** dawræ niftim di wawræ nat gə.

xu or **gə** can be used as complementizers. Again, when “**gə**” is replaced by “**xu**”, the pragmatic function of the sentence changes. Although the place has not changed, a different item is salient in each sentence.

| Kurdish Example | English Translation |
|---|--|
| xwæm zanəm gə 'æreurənijaj myself know for there do not come | I know that you do not come there. |
| æli xwe duwət gə qəbulaw nijaw Ali himself was saying (that) pass does not | Ali knew (that) he cannot pass the exam. |
| ej xwe dəzanəs tʃæ bəke she herself was knowing what does | She knew what to do. |
| imæ wətimən (kə) e tʃeʃtæ qəbul We said (that) this thing agree nijækəjm. do not | We said that, we cannot compromise with you. |
| fəməsim (xu) ki teləgæ dəzi understood (that) who gold the stole | We understood who has stolen the gold. |

- xwæm zanəm gə 'ære urə nijaj → Means: I know that you do not come **there**
- xwæm zanəm **xu** ære urə 'nijaj → Means: I know that you **do not come** there (you need not to tell me)
- fəməsim gə 'ki teləgæ dəzi → Means: We know **who** has stolen the gold
- fəməsim **xu** ki teləgæ 'dəzi → Means: We know who has stolen **the gold**

In Kurdish, it is usual to use **kə/gə** with an equal meaning to “when”. We will show it in the following examples:

| Kurdish example | English Translation |
|--|---|
| juwækije gə tʃəgəm ærə məlejan, dime. Morning the that went I for home, saw him | The morning that I went there, I saw him. |

². This symbol is conventionally used to show unacceptable/unnatural sentences.

| | |
|---|--|
| ruze gə dus dɒʃti bəʃimən ære le mæɾjæm day the when like you go we for beside Maryam | When you are ready, we can go and see Maryam. |
| ewarə gə bawgət dijaɪ biʃe ʃæ biʃæ evening when father your comes tell him what happened | As soon as your father comes, tell him what the matter is. |
| awægə kəlɪja bərendʒæ bəkæ de water when get boiled rice the put in | When the water is boiling, add the rice! |

- a. ʃuwækije gə ʃægəm ærə mælejan, dime.
b. ruze gə dus dɒʃti bəʃimən ære le mæɾjæm

Unlike examples above, here **xu** is not a candidate to occupy the **kə** position. If we use **xu** instead, the sentence is no longer acceptable:

- c. *ʃuwækije xu ʃægəm ærə mælejan, dime.
d. *ruze xu dus dɒʃti bəʃimən ære le mæɾjæm

Sometimes these particles are used to express some sort of "indifference" about an event. Look at the following examples:

- a. ʃægə xu ʃægə
has gone she that has gone she
It is not important for me that she is gone.
b. niɟaj xu niɟaj
does not come that does not come
It is not important for me that he does not come.
c. iʃe xu iʃe
says that says
it is not important for me what s/he says.

It should be noted that, it is less natural to use **kə** instead of **xu** in the sentences mentioned above. Sometimes **xu** is used in imperative sentences:

- a. 'bəja xu!
come (FOC)
Come!
b. 'bəniʃ xu!
sit down (FOC)
Sit down!
c. 'bənur xu!
see (FOC)
See!
d. 'bəxwæ xu!
eat (FOC)
Eat!

- e. 'bətʃu xu!
go (FOC)
Go!

In these examples, “xu” is exclusively used to focalize the verb. In other words, when “xu” is deleted, the sentence is grammatical but non-focal. Here “ke” cannot be an alternative for “xu” and replacing leads to ungrammaticality:

- f. *bəja kə!

g. *bəniʃ kə!

h. *bəxwə kə!

i. *bətʃu kə!

It can be seen that different constituents can be focalized by “kə” or “xu”. Noun phrases, Verb Phrases, Prepositional Phrases, etc. can be focalized according to the place of these focus markers:

æli **xu** xwe duwət **gə** qəbulaw nijaw

Here “xu” can reinforce a NP (=æli) and “gə” can focalize VP (=qəbulaw nijaw).

Conclusion

In this article, we illustrated and discussed different functions of **kə** and **xu** in Ilami dialect of Kurdish. We saw that these particles are productively used in this dialect. They can be used as relative pronouns, complementizers and so forth. When these morphemes are used to focalize a constituent, the focalized item does not necessarily contain new information. Although we call these morphemes as “parallel focus markers”, it doesn’t mean they have the same effects on a structure. We saw that, they do focalize Noun Phrases, Verb Phrases, Prepositional Phrases, etc. But it was also shown that each particle has its own contextual and pragmatic impact. Logically, we should not put all of our eggs in focus markers’ basket. When these markers focalize items, no movement is required. In other words, these intentional differences (made by focus) are not due to use of such markers alone. It is natural that some prosodic features are also applied to transfer those intensions. So this kind of focus should be considered as *prosodic focus* rather than *syntactic focus*. For example, the place of primary stress in a sentence like “pejagə **xu** dawrə niʃti 'qawməmanə” is different from “pejagə **kə** 'dawrə niʃti qawməmanə”. It might be worth noting that, Kurdish allows “multiple reinforcement”, when more than one focus marker is used in a sentence, for example “jaru ləbasə **gə** ære xwəm sənəm **xu** damə duma” simultaneously enjoys two focus markers.

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